

Trinidad & Tobago | Trip Report | June 20–29, 2024 | by James Petersen



With James Petersen with local guide Dave, Lestor and Jason. Our clients included Frank, Anne, Libby, Tom, and Barbara.



Thurs., Jun. 20

Pax Guest House | Hacienda Jacana

For those early arrivals, we started out birding the feeders at the Pax Guest House at first light. The feeders were overrun with Hummingbird activity, as Tom and James got their first looks at many of the common hummingbird species of Trinidad, including Tufted Coquette working the Vervain flowers, multiple Ruby-topaz, Blue-chinned Sapphire, White-chested Emerald, Black-throated Mango and a few Copper-rumped Hummingbirds. We took a break from the hummingbird feeders and watched as the thermals started to build and with them all the vultures started to rise with them. Mixed in with the vultures was a smaller Short-tailed Hawk while a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl called in the distance. While we ate breakfast, many Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers called and flew back and forth, perching in the gutters of the building while band-rumped swifts zoomed overhead.

After breakfast, we were met by our local guide for the Trinidad part, Dave. Our final stop for the day was to be



the Hacienda Jacana, where we would meet the rest of the group come dinner time. But our first stop was birding the Estate parks. Here we had tiny yellow Saffron Finches feeding on the ground, while several Fork-tailed Palm Swifts and White-winged Swallows zoomed through the air. A few herons worked the tiny pond and wet areas of the park including Wattled Jacana, Black-crowned Night Herons, and a Striated Heron. Meanwhile, a large Ringed Kingfisher flew by, briefly perching.

After a stop to pick up lunch—which both of us got Goat Roti- we arrived at the Hacienda Jacana. Here, as we ate lunch we relaxed on the porch for the whole afternoon, watching the mixed flocks work our way past us. We had a Little Hermit working some flowers while the most common bird that made up the mixed flocks were Palm Tanagers. A Chivi Vireo sang in the distance while both Cocoa and Spectacled Thrush were seen and heard. The afternoon passed quickly, between scanning the skies and the mixed flocks that had worked there was through the area. Right before dinner, we had 4 large blackbirds, perched way in the distance. With some scope views, they turned out to be 4 Giant Cowbirds! Before we knew it, it was time to meet the rest of the group over a delicious dinner. Afterwards, with much to look forward to, everyone turned in for the night.

**Fri., Jun. 21 Hacienda Jacana | Coconut Alley | Nariva Swamp
| Kernahan Village Road**

We started out the morning meeting for breakfast. The first bird we spotted were several Smooth-billed Anis. While looking at the Smooth-billed Anis, a pair of Silver-beaked Tanagers foraged across the road, with one male perching out in the open and offering amazing views. At the nearby flowers and hummingbird feeders, a Black-throated Mango was darting in and out, and a Ruby Topaz was only slightly more cooperative. The Copper-rumped Hummingbird came in and fed longer, giving better views. Behind the feeder, a female Tufted Coquette was busy among the Vervain flowers. Meanwhile, a plain-colored Cocoa Thrush came to bathe at the birdbath. We were met for the day by Dave, our local guide for the Trinidad portion of the trip. As we walked toward the van, a Green-backed Trogon started calling, so we had to locate this bird. After a few short minutes, we found the yellow-bellied bird and watched it call to its mate; the female was found shortly after. They both took turns perching out in the open for everyone to see. As we loaded into the vans and began to leave, we saw one last bird, a Blue-black Grassquit, performing for an unseen female nearby, doing its "Johnny jump up" dance where it would leap into the air while singing, for an unseen female.



We didn't get far from the Hacienda before our first stop, as the Dave heard both a Black-crested Antshrike and a Rufous-tailed Jacamar. With some patience, we had the mohawked Black-crested Antshrike directly overhead while a Rufous-tailed Jacamar appeared and gave great views as it hawked insects from the nearby wire. At that point, a small flock of birds moved through the canopy, led by a few Green Honeyeaters and briefly including a Tropical Parula. While the flock was moving through, a trogon flew in and perched overhead. This allowed us to get good scope views of this Guianan Trogon. Giving us great views of the differences between the earlier seen Green-backed Trogon and the Guianan Trogon. Once the flock moved on, we continued towards our next stop.

Our next stop was on a side road where our guide had seen Green-rumped Parrotlets recently. After a few minutes of scanning, he found them, one perched above a metal tube, the other sticking its head out, likely from a nest inside. From here, we made another brief stop at the Aripo Livestock fields, where a bright, orange-breasted Savanna Hawk perched on some telephone wires. Meanwhile, numerous Fork-tailed Flycatchers and some Yellow-hooded Blackbirds flew back and forth across the field. Surprisingly, two Crested Caracaras were walking around in the field, mostly hidden by the crops. A few minutes later, one flew up to perch near us, giving great views of this bird, identified as an immature with pink facial skin. The Caracara soon took off, flying over the open fields where it was soon mobbed by Southern Lapwings and Yellow-hooded Blackbirds. Next, we had a delicious picnic lunch at Manzanilla Beach (Atlantic side of the island) attended by a handful of Gray-breasted Martins perched nearby and a few Carib Grackles begging for scraps of food.

Continuing onwards, we birded the Nariva Swamp, a freshwater swamp dominated by Red Mangroves. As we drove along the swamp, groups of Smooth-billed Anis popped in and out of the vegetation, while Common Black and Savanna Hawks perched in the palm trees. A hawk perched at the edge of the swamp caught our eye; it turned out to be a rather uncommon Snail Kite! We watched this young bird fly around the marsh for a little while before moving on. As we neared the Nariva River, the Red Mangroves thickened, and our scanning paid off with 3-4 Bicolored Conebills foraging in the mangroves and a brief appearance by a Red-rumped Woodpecker. Further down, we heard the descending rattle of a Streak-headed Woodcreeper and eventually spotted a small American Pygmy Kingfisher.



The Nariva Swamp led to our last stop of the day, the Kernahan Village Road. This area, once abundant with rice farming, now grows watermelons and hosts waterbirds in the remaining wetter areas. As we started down the road, we noticed Limpkins sporadically running away from us as we tried to get closer. Finally, we lucked onto one close enough for Tom to get a good photograph as it stalked away. Continuing around the loop, we saw many Southern Lapwings and Wattled Jacanas. While the drier areas were teeming with Blue-black Grassquits. We stopped in an area full of reedy grass, used some playback, and a Yellow-chinned Spinetail popped out—a skulky marsh bird with a light brown back, white breast, and a hint of yellow on its chin). Near the Spinetail, a Crested Elaenia perched in a nearby tree, while Pied-water Tyrants flew back and forth. As we turned to head back, a large silhouette with a long tail in the distance was seen. They turned into 6+ Blue-and-Yellow Macaws perched in a distant palm tree. Everyone marveled at these wild Macaws as they descended back and forth between what was thought to be a Mango tree and the palm tree. Continuing down the road, we got much closer looks at four of these amazing birds. After a quick stop for watermelon, we headed back to Hacienda Jacana for a meal and to tally up our checklist for the day.

Sat., Jun. 22

Hacienda Jacana | Asa Wright Nature Center

We started out birding Hacienda Jacana in the morning before and during breakfast. As we walked down to breakfast, we had the morning flyover of Orange-winged parrots identified by their raucous calls as well as the song of spectacled thrush echoing through the woods. During and after breakfast, we kept an eye on the feeders and nearby bird bath where we were rewarded with sights of Cocoa Thrush, Cooper-rumped Hummingbird and a Ruby Topaz getting their morning energy along with the laughing call of a distant Gray-cowled Woodrail. After breakfast, we had some Orange-winged Parrots land in a nearby dead snag, allowing us to put the spotting scope on them. While watching the parrots, Anne looked up and noticed some raptors soaring gracefully overhead; our first and only Swallow-tailed Kites of the trip!

Once Dave came to get us, we started out for the day, heading straight to Asa Wright; in order to maximize our time there, as the next few mornings would be spent elsewhere. On the way to Asa, we were given a brief explanation about this side of the Island by Dave. This forested area is the “French” side of the Island and is



made up of primary rainforest—the type that hasn't been touched or modified by people yet. 70 percent of the forest on this northern part of the island is still standing today and is used as a watershed for Trinidad. We worked our way further up to Asa, passing thick forests interposed with farms.

Upon getting to Asa Wright, Dave started identifying some of the flowers as we drove in, pointing out Angel Trumpet flowers that are bat pollinated to a few Cecropia trees that are favored food sources for Hermits. Upon getting to Asa, we had the rest of the morning free, to sit and watch the feeders before our local guide, Mukesh, was going to take us out in the afternoon. The feeders here were awash with hummingbirds, from green and blue, White-necked Jacobins to Brown Violetears to White-chested Emeralds, most of them spreading their feathers and taking advantage of one of the tropical downpours to bathe themselves. Aside from the hummingbirds, we also had good looks at Guianan Trogon and distant scope views of a Black-tailed Tityra and Scaled Pigeon. A Trinidad Euphonia called, the only one of the trip, while White-lined and Blue Gray Tanagers kept busy at the feeders. Green Honey Creeper were also sporadically making visits to the feeders. Towards lunch time, a Squirrel Cuckoo; a long tailed skulky bird, gave good looks while it perched in a few trees before disappearing.

After lunch, we met up with Mukesh, the lead guide at Asa Wright and followed him onto one of Asa Wrights many trails. As we hiked the trail, he pointed out different kinds of plants such as the bright Hawaiian torch plant and Lobster Claw flowers—another favorite food source of Hermits. Along the way, he stopped after hearing some Manakin calls, and a pair of White bearded Manakin was found foraging in the tree along a male Golden-headed Manakin! We continued down the trail to the White-bearded Manakin lek. Here, all the males gathered and were dancing, jumping up and down on the small sticks in the hope that one would attract a female. The forest was alive with the wing snaps they do while on the lek.

We ventured further after the lek, chasing what sounded like someone swinging a hammer and striking metal. This was the call of the Bearded Bellbird, one of the loudest calls for a bird its size in Trinidad. This would become a common call for us during the rest of our stay at Asa Wright, but it was the first time hearing it for all. Eventually, we located a Bellbird just below the canopy who would call from its perch and fly off. Only to return



and do its loud call moments later. Everyone got good scope views of the bird and even some shots as he called from his spot in the forest.

After the bellbirds, we turned around and slowly worked our way back up the trail back to the feeders, seemingly being escorted up the trail by a distant White-throated Thrush. Back at the feeders, we had many of the same hummingbirds, mixed in with some new ones. The late afternoon was the perfect time for the Long-billed Starthroats to come out. We had two perching on a few dead snags, trying to get at the nectar feeder but being chased away by the White-necked Jacobins. As we were all watching the Starthroat- Libby spotted a Ruby Topaz that was trying to sneak in the lower feeders without being noticed. It turned out to be one of the more cooperative Ruby Topaz's of the trip as it alternated perching in an area that was good for watching it and feeding on the nectar feeders.

After a delicious dinner, we met another one of Asa's guides at 745 to go out for a night walk. The night walk was amazing, as we had two species of snake on the road, a Coffee Snake and a Flatlined snake. Continuing further down the road, we got some great looks at one of the many land crabs that reside in these forests as well as a line of leafcutter ants, some going to the colony with bits of leaves and others going out for more. At our furthest point, our guide spotted a massive Trinidad Tarantula and Libby found a greenish caterpillar that was thought to be a Morpho butterfly. Heading back, we came across two different species of Scorpion. We ended the night by going down to the hummingbird feeders that were getting swarmed with Bats.

Sun., Jun. 23 Asa Wright Nature Center | Brasso Seco | Mourn La Croix

We started our meeting before breakfast to bird at the feeders. A few of us ventured off to try to get photos of the Tufted Coquettes that liked to be by the Vervain flowers above the feeders. Once a few were located, we ventured down to the feeders to see the show, where multiple species of hummingbirds buzzed in to get their morning breakfast, including many White-necked Jacobins, Brown Violetears, and a few White-chested Emeralds. Also hanging around the feeders was the loud call of the Barred Antshrike, or jailbird as it is sometimes called here, which soon made an appearance below in the dense bushes.



After a hearty breakfast, we set off to bird the road to Brasso Seco. We first stopped just below the fog where we walked a small portion of the trail, picking up a single Tufted Coquette working some flowers along with a Black-tailed Tityra. With it seeming quiet, we walked back to the van and drove to the main portion of the road where we stopped to have a view of the Caribbean side of the island. As we walked out, we started hearing chips of a large mixed flock of birds coming into a few of the higher trees that poked out of the canopy.

The mixed flock kept us very busy, with six different species of tanagers—from the dirty green of Palm Tanagers to the blue-gray plumage of Blue-gray Tanagers to the brilliant green and ruddy head of a stunning male Bay-headed Tanager. The flock also contained all three species of honeycreeper (Red-legged, Purple, and Green) perched in the open on the same tree, along with some Blue Dacnis as well. Meanwhile, Gray-rumped Swifts zoomed by as the vultures started to feel the thermals for the day. Throughout the rest of the drive down, we had vultures overhead with some Plumbeous Kites mixed in with them.

We continued on to the next stop, where we had a Collared Trogon, the only one of the trip, calling in the distance. With some work, we got this red-breasted, green-backed bird to fly in, giving all great looks at this stunning bird. Nearby, there was an Aztec Ant nest up in a tree. Here, we learned how the Trogon uses the ants to clean its feathers (anting), but it comes back so many times, the ants decide to move, and allows the Trogon to use the old ant nest for nesting. Once the Trogons fledge, the ants come back to their old nest.

Further down the road, we came across another mixed flock, where a Golden-crowned Warbler chipped in the understory. With some work, we got good looks at this skulky warbler as a Little Tinamou hauntingly called in the background and a Golden-fronted Greenlet worked the understory. A few more miles down the road, both a Great Antshrike and a Rufous-breasted Wren called but mostly stayed hidden in a thick patch of bamboo. As we got closer to Brasso Seco, the habitat opened up a little. In these more open areas, we found a Yellow-bellied Seedeater, a rare but increasing bird of Trinidad. We finally arrived in Brasso Seco, ready for lunch. After a delicious lunch at Brasso Seco, we were shown how they make chocolate. Starting with picking the fruit once it ripens and turns yellow. The fruit is then cut open revealing a white fleshy meat that surrounds the actual bean. Once sorted, it is dried, which causes the meat to fall off, exposing the bean. The bean was then dried, and in the old days, they would put them underneath the house on a roller system, where they could roll



the floor out to dry the beans. When it started to rain, they could just slide it underneath to keep them dry. If they get wet, it ruins the bean. Once dry, the beans are ground up into nibs. Everyone in the group got to taste some of these extremely bitter nibs. After that, we all got to taste some of their final candy bars and some chocolate tea—both were delicious. As we were getting ready to head off, a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl started calling in the distance. We all saw a flash of brown fly from one tree to the next, and with some searching, everyone got views of this small owl. Upon leaving we had a quick drive through Brasso Seco which yielded a flyby Yellow Oriole, some used Yellow-rumped Caique nests, as well as a Spectacled Thrush on a nest.

We continued back up the road to Mourn La Croix. A few stops in, we had another mixed flock that contained a Streaked Xenops. As we were trying to locate this small bird, a tiny hummingbird flew in and perched up high. Upon further scrutiny, it turned out to be an unusual Rufous-vented Woodstar, just barely seen before it flew off. Afterwards, we later got good looks at a Xenops as it crept up a tree. As we were getting back into the car, Dave noticed a large Kiskadee-like flycatcher above us. This bird, when looked at, had a truly massive bill, making it a Boat-billed Flycatcher! After admiring the bird for a while, we continued back up the road to Mourn La Croix.

As we reached Mourn La Croix, we stopped to check for the Trinidad Motmot, an endemic bird to Trinidad and Tobago. We heard its deep call from far off in the forest, but it was not coming out for us, so we continued into Mourn La Croix. A few miles later, we stopped to view some Rufous-tailed Jacamars that were flycatching from the wires. From the tree line behind us, we heard the double-noted call of a Striped Cuckoo. Amazingly, this soon followed with the Striped Cuckoo flying out and perching on one of the telephone wires for us! We continued into Mourn La Croix, where we had pastries and tea that were packed for us by Asa Wright. As we enjoyed it, a few Yellow-rumped Cacicques flew over while some Trogons called. Barbara was able to track down the calling Trogons, revealing two eye-level Guianan Trogons—a male and a female—who obliged all by perching not only together but out in the open! This allowed us a good comparison on how to tell the green backed male from the duller female. As the pastries were finished, we all loaded up and headed back to dinner at Asa Wright after a fantastic day out in the field.



Mon., Jun. 24 Asa Wright Nature Center | Caroni Swamp

We started out the morning with some feeder watching before breakfast. Just like the morning before, the Bellbirds were calling away as all the hummingbirds were getting their fill at the nectar feeders. After a filling breakfast, we met the lead guide of Asa Wright, Markush for a short talk about the history of Asa Wright. The original house was founded and built in the early 1900's as a cocoa farm. Eventually, it was bought in the 1960's by Asa and Newsome Wright, who were Icelandic and British. From there, it was slowly turned into the nature center we see today.

After the short history talk, Markush led us on a bird walk, taking us down the paved entrance road and pointing out different species as we moved along. At the start, we had a Tufted Coquette on the Vervaine flower and two Long-billed Starthroats perched up in a dead snag. Continuing on, we had stunning looks at a close Banded Antshrike as well as decent looks at two Gray Leaf-tossers as they flew across the road and foraged briefly on the dry hillside. At the furthest point in the walk, we had good looks at both a White-winged Becard and a Plain Antvireo as they both foraged as part of one of the many mixed flocks of the trip. On the way back, we had a Long-billed Gnatwren calling in the distance. An Aztec Ant nest was noticed, and the Trogon anting and nesting behavior was explained. After lunch, we headed out for the rest of the day's birding. On the way out of Asa, Dave, spotted a perched raptor, which turned out to be the first Gray-lined Hawk of the trip.

Our next stops were some birding in the "Estates Park" in Port of Spain. Here we picked up a few new species for the trip. At the small ponds, we had more looks at Southern Lapwings and a Wattled Jacana with some babies as well as an unusual nesting Yellow-hooded Blackbird. Dave explained later they don't usually nest by marshes. While looking at some of the marsh birds, Barbara spotted an all-black bird with a white head, our only White-headed Marsh Tyrant of the trip! A little further up, we had 27 Saffron Finches feeding in the grass, most of them halfway between dull immature plumage and the bright yellow of the adults. While overhead, short-tailed Swifts whizzed by. From the estates, we had another short stop in a weedy field that yielded some stunning, Red-breasted Meadowlarks.



After those series of short stops, we arrived at the area for our Caroni Swamp boat trip a bit early, giving us some time to bird the Red Mangroves next to the road. Here, we had some good looks at a Straight-billed Woodcreeper and a roosting Tropical Screech Owl. By this time, it was time to go out on the boat tour of the Caroni Swamp.

Heading out, it was low tide and there were glimpses of small flocks of Scarlet Ibis that were feeding/looking for fiddler crabs on the exposed tidal flats. Meanwhile, we had more looks at some close Yellow-chinned Spinetails as well as very brief looks at more American Pygmy Kingfishers. While still in the mangrove section, we passed a few Little Blue Herons, a nesting Yellow-crowned Night heron, and a group of 4 young Tropical Screech Owls huddled together in some vegetation. It was also in the mangroves where a Green-throated Mango was perched up while some Common Waxbills flew past.

Upon getting out to the main opening of the marsh, we were greeted to a couple small flocks of American Flamingos! Some were feeding while others were just standing in the water. More were visible by the main Island. Once we tied up the boat, dinner was served and during dinner we were awed by large flocks of Scarlet Ibis streaming overhead. These birds were mixed with some heading back to their nests after an afternoon of feeding while others put down on the mangrove island, giving it a speckled scarlet and green appearance. As the evening wore on, the flocks kept coming with some being as large as 100+ birds! In total, we estimated we saw 500+ Scarlet Ibis during dinner. As the sun began to set, we headed back to the dock, and flushed 2 Striated Herons while we were in the mangroves. By then, it was nightfall and we headed to back to Asa after a great day in the field.

Mon., Jun. 25 Asa Wright Nature Center | Bhagnath Hummingbird Estate | Grand Riveria

We started the day watching the feeders at Asa Wright with the usual hummingbirds coming in while Bellbirds called in the distance. After breakfast, we were picked up by Dave and started heading towards the Bhagnath Hummingbird estate. Along the way, a raptor was noticed perched on a telephone wire. Upon stopping and looking, it turned out to be a young Plumbeous Kite. As we watched numerous adults circling in the air, one

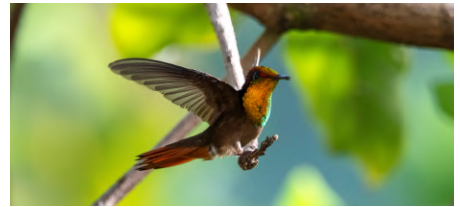


came down and gave it some food before flying away. This was observed several times over the course of the next 15 minutes. While this was happening, a mixed flock started to move through the understory next to us that included looks at Golden-fronted Greenlet, Blue Dacnis and a nice look at an Ochre-lored Flatbill, Forest Elaenia along with a few Bananaquits. A Rufous-browed Peppershrike called in the distance but remained hidden. Continuing on, we reached the Bhagnath Hummingbird estate.

We stayed at the Bhagnath Hummingbird estate for a few hours, having fun observing and photographing all the hummingbirds that were coming to the feeders. We observed a total of 8 species of hummingbirds that compromised an estimated 40 different individuals. The most common were the 15 or so White-necked Jacobins. Nearby, we had great views of a tiny male Tufted Coquette feeding on the Vervain flowers. We also observed a Cocoa Woodcreeper and our first of a three of Trinidad Piping Guans for the day! This one was perched in the trees at the entrance of the place and interrupted lunch for us to see.

Continuing on, we reached our lodging for the night and checked in before heading back out to look for some more Trinidad Piping Guans. These birds are endemic to Trinidad and have undergone large declines—making it one of the rarest birds in the world. We stopped at the top of Monte Video Road and started working our way down the road. At the top, we had a nice kettle of raptors soaring overhead that included a few Plumbeous Kites, numerous vultures and a Short-tailed Hawk mixed in. As we started walking, we flushed two Common Pauraques from the sides of the road. Frank then spotted a Lineated Woodpecker which everyone had good looks at. We stopped halfway down the road and waited for Dave to get the van, so we could drive further down the road, in search of some Piping Guans. Once we reached as far as we could go, we got out and were greeted with the haunting call of a Little Tinamou calling in the distance. A flock of Blue-gray Tanagers flew overhead while a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl whistled in the distance.

We started working our way back, with our next stop in a clearing where some Turquoise Tanagers flew overhead. A perched raptor was then spotted, giving good looks at another Gray-lined Hawk. It stayed perched for a bit before deciding to fly away. We were on our way to our third stop when Dave noticed a large shape standing in the trees—a Trinidad Piping Guan! Unlike the last one, this one was very cooperative as we watched him stand motionless in the trees and work his way out into the open. Giving all amazing looks at this black and



white Guan with a blue wattle. We finally bid the guan goodbye and continued to our third stop, where a Silvered Antbird was calling. After a while, this shy bird also came to the edge of the forest, letting everyone get brief views of it before receding back into the undergrowth. We finished birding and headed back to Grand Riveria.

After some downtime at Grand Riveria, we gathered on the beach to watch as the turtle patrols were going to let a bunch of baby Leatherback Sea Turtles go. They patrol this beach all day, collecting the baby turtles who hatch to prevent the frigatebirds and other wild animals from eating them. Right before sunset, when the Frigatebirds are least active, they were let go. We all got to watch as the tiny turtles dashed down the beach and into the water to start their journey to adulthood. From then, it was dinner time. After a delicious dinner, we celebrated Frank's 70th birthday with a huge cake.

Afterwards, we gathered on the beach with redlights to hopefully see several of the giant adult Leatherback Sea turtles come up on the beach to lay their eggs. We were not disappointed and were able to see 2 huge Leatherbacks in the process of laying their eggs. We were able to see them in their egg laying trance as well as them covering up the nests before heading back to the ocean. After a long, fantastic day, we turned in for the night.

Tues., Jun. 26

Grand Riveria | Flight to Tobago | Cuffie River Nature Retreat

We started out today birding the premises of the hotel, with brief looks at both a Gray-cowled Wood-Rail and a Ringed Kingfisher, while a Yellow-headed Caracara flew down the beach and Frigatebirds circled overhead. After breakfast, we left to head to the airport for our 25-minute flight to Tobago.

Upon arriving in Tobago, we were greeted by our local guide, Jason. Our first stop was one of two sewage ponds, the Bon Accord Ponds. On the way over, we scanned the beach looking for gulls and found both Laughing Gulls and our only Lesser Black-backed Gull. We also had our first looks at a Caribbean Martin, a bird not found on Trinidad. We passed some mudflats on the way to the ponds that had both Fiddler and Mud Crabs running



about, while two Whimbrels were foraging as well. At the ponds themselves, we saw several new birds for the trip, including tiny, yellow-eyed Least Grebes, Eared Doves, and Black-faced Grassquits. There were a few Anhingas at the pond's edge, drying their wings in the afternoon sun. Upon heading back to the van, we had a surprise flyby of a Mangrove Cuckoo, who disappeared into the nearby shrubs. While driving between the two stops, we had good looks at both White-tipped Dove and a Pale-vented Pigeon, both birds not found on Trinidad.

Our next stop after finishing up at the Bon Accord Sewage Ponds was the Centre Street Ponds. Here we came across a small flock of foraging Fork-tailed Flycatchers, some still with complete long tail feathers! On the ponds themselves, there was a group of White-cheeked Pintails, with a large number of young following behind them. Surprisingly, mixed in with the young was an uncommon Ring-necked Duck, a bird that should be in more northerly areas right now. Further scanning of the ponds revealed numerous, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks and two Blue-winged Teals. As we were leaving, we took one more scan of the herons and noticed one that was a little different in structure with gray lores. This turned out to be a Little Egret, a rare European vagrant to the area. Everyone got great looks at this bird right next to a Snowy Egret, showcasing the differences between these two species. By now, dinner was approaching, and we finished the drive to our lodge for the next two nights at Cuffie River Nature Retreat. On the way up the drive, two White-tailed Nightjars flushed from the road, and we were greeted by Regina Dumas, the owner of the lodge. Over a delicious dinner, Regina shared with us her story and how she came to build and run Cuffie River Nature River Retreat.

Thurs., Jun. 27 Cuffie River Nature Retreat | Adventure Farm

We started the day watching the feeders at Cuffie River before breakfast. Here, we spotted some new trip birds, such as the loud Rufous-vented Chachalaca, White-tailed Saberwing, and Trinidad Motmot calling, as well as some more common birds like Palm Tanager and Streaked Flycatchers. While keeping watch at the feeders, Tom spotted a small flycatcher that turned out to be a Yellow-bellied Elaenia, and Anne spotted the first Rufous-vented Chachalaca of the trip perched high in the canopy. Meanwhile, Frank found a Streaked Flycatcher nest that everyone later got to see. Right before breakfast, Tom found a Rufous-breasted Hermit sitting on the floor near the dining area.



After a delicious breakfast, we met up with the local guide, Desmond, for a guided bird walk of the Cuffie River area. As we snaked our way up the driveway, Desmond immediately started pointing out some of the calls we were hearing, such as the deep cooing of the Pale-vented Pigeons versus the whooping calls of the Trinidad Motmots. Right as we got to the start of the forest border, we spotted a new bird, a male Blue-backed Manakin. This species skips over Trinidad but has several leks on Tobago. This bird was very cooperative, letting all see his red crown and blue back. Continuing further into the forest, we heard the wit calls of several Brown-crested Flycatchers and a few mournful calls of a Venezuelan Flycatcher. A bit later in the walk, we had fantastic looks at this dark-beaked bird, another species found on Tobago but not on Trinidad. Further on, we heard the loud calls of Barred Antshrikes and the call of a Northern White-fringed Antwren that stayed hidden. At the same time, a raptor flew overhead, with dark edging on the wings—a Broad-winged Hawk. By this time, we had made it back to the road and arrived back at the lodge in time for lunch. Our lunch was delicious—a mash of cornmeal and veggies that was precooked and then steamed while wrapped in banana leaves—Pastelles. After lunch, we headed out, starting to drive through the capital city of Tobago—Scarborough. During this, Jason explained a little about the history of Scarborough—how Tobago changed hands 33 times between different nations until it was joined with Trinidad in the 1800s. We also got to see a little of Fort King George, which overlooks the city and the harbor and was built in the late 1700s.

After driving through Scarborough, we arrived at the Adventure Farm, an area with some feeders and nice trails through the underbrush. At the feeders, we had brief looks at a Red-crowned Woodpecker. At the ring of a bell, which signals to the birds that it's feeding time, a Trinidad Motmot flew in, grabbed a giant slice of banana, and flew off. A few minutes later, either the same bird or maybe a second one flew in and grabbed some more bananas before flying away. Away from the feeders, we had more looks at some more Motmots as well as brief looks at a Streaked Spinetail that seemed to dance all around us but never gave more than a 10-second view of the bird. Jason then led us through the remainder of the short trail, identifying many plants as we made our way back to the van. Our last stop of the day was a lookout from Fort James (the oldest fort on the island). Here, we had several Common Terns foraging over the water, while one Royal Tern cruised down the beach. From here, we continued back to Cuffie for dinner of fish and vegetables. During dinner, we heard a Common Potoo calling from the forest. After dinner, we did our evening checklist and prepared for a long day the next day.



Fri., Jun. 28

Cuffie River Nature Retreat | Tobago Main Ridge Forest Reserve | Little Tobago

On our last full day of the trip, we spent the pre-breakfast time both watching the feeders and sitting on the veranda overlooking the backside of the lodge. We had numerous views of more White-tailed Sabrewings coming to the feeders while the Rufous-vented Chachalacas did their morning calling at 7 a.m. Frank, who was sitting on the veranda at the time, spotted the second White-winged Becard of the trip while we were looking at a Barred Antshrike calling and pumping its tail at the same time. There was also a Gray Kingbird flitting from perch to perch, flycatching, while the White-tipped Doves called in the distance. After breakfast, we left for the day's birding areas.

Our first stop was the Main Forest Reserve, an area on Tobago that has been protected since 1776. A member of the British Parliament at the time noticed that deforested areas lose water, so he proposed that this area be protected. It took a few years, but the area was eventually protected to safeguard the water sources on Tobago. We stopped just outside the forest reserve, where Jason spotted a Giant Cowbird. After some scanning, the Giant Cowbird was relocated, begging for food from some Oropendolas. It flew off quickly, but we found an adult Giant Cowbird in the area a few minutes later.

Upon entering the forest reserve, we stopped to do some birding at the visitor center. In a nearby tree, a Golden-olive Woodpecker was spotted and stayed around long enough for everyone to get great looks. Across the road, a Scrub Greenlet called but remained hidden in the forest. After finishing at the visitor center, we moved on to the Gilpin Trail. Here, we hiked out to another lek, this one a Blue-backed Manakin lek. We had good looks at a few Blue-backed Manakins before heading to the next trail. At the start of the second trail, we heard alarm calls from several Manakins. With some careful scanning, a Trinidad Motmot was observed flying off, the source of the alarm, as they are nest predators. Continuing down the trail, we came across some calling frogs, the Bloody Bay Ravine frogs—an endemic species to Tobago! Further on, Frank noticed a bird in the distance that turned out to be the only Yellow-legged Thrush of the trip, while Barbara located a Rufous-breasted Wren—the first seen on the trip but a common song throughout. On the way back up the trail, Jason pointed out some fish, Jumping Juabins, which can actually “jump between pools of water.” Once we got back to



the van, we continued toward our lunch spot, stopping to admire the scenic bays that make up the Caribbean side of Tobago.

After lunch, we boarded a boat to take us to Little Tobago Island. This site was home to an introduced bird of paradise in the 1800s. These birds lasted until the 1960s before a hurricane led to their extinction. The trip over was uneventful, with several Bridled Terns and some Red-footed Boobies cruising the offshore waters. Additionally, several Brown Noddies were seen. Upon landing, we started up the trail, slowly birding our way up. At the top of the hill, an Ocellated Gecko, endemic to Tobago, was found. Upon reaching the overlook, we were greeted with massive numbers of seabirds, with Laughing Gulls being the most common. With some scanning, we were able to find all three morphs of Red-footed Booby (Dark, Light, and White-tailed), as well as several Masked Boobies. A few Sooty Terns were perched low on the rocks by the water's edge as Magnificent Frigatebirds cruised the skies. Meanwhile, up to six Red-billed Tropicbirds cruised back and forth, trying to avoid the attention of the Frigatebirds, who chased them to get a free meal. After taking in the seabirds for a while, it was time to head back down and return to Tobago. On the way back, everyone marveled at the coral reefs that the glass-bottomed boat passed. The coral reefs included multiple fish such as Black Triggerfish, Sergeant Majors, Bicolored Damselfish, and Blue Tangs, as well as sea fans and numerous species of corals. Upon getting back to the dock, we returned to Cuffie River for the end-of-trip dinner.

During the end of the trip dinner, we asked everyone what their favorite bird/mammal/wildlife moment of the trip was. For the favorites, Libby's top three were the Black-throated Mango feeding the baby at the nest while at the Bhagnath Hummingbird Estate, seeing the baby leatherback sea turtles and her first time walking out on the Asa Wright Veranda. Anne's top three was the first morning walk to breakfast and seeing a Channel-billed Toucan, seeing the Guans and the baby Cane Toads. Frank's favorite was the Blue and Yellow Macaws. Tom's was seeing the Tufted Coquettes, and seeing the White-necked Jacobin's taking a shower while at Asa Wright. Barbara's was the White-necked Jacobin's, Bananaquits and just about everything. James's was both the Trinidad Motmots and the Trinidad Piping Guans.

Sat., Jun. 29

Departures

We woke up to some rain. So, after a delicious final breakfast of eggs, fruit, bread we packed up and were

picked up by Jason to be transported back to the Tobago airport to start everyone's journey back to their respective destinations. At the airport, everyone wished each other bye after a fantastic trip filled with memorable bird and wildlife sightings.

Photos: Scarlet Ibis and American Flamingos (James Petersen - JP), Tufted Coquette (JP), Trinidad Motmot (Thomas Taylor - TT), Leatherback Turtles (TT), Masked Cardinal (TT), Collared Trogon (TT), Channel Billed Toucan (Libby Plyler - LP), Copper-rumped Hummingbird (TT), Common Black Hawk (LP), Blue-and-yellow Macaws (LP), Silver-beaked Tanager (TT), Guianan Trogon (TT), American Pygmy Kingfisher (LP), White Necked Jacobin Bathing (LP), Ruby Topaz (LP), Group birding (JP), Smooth Billed Ani (LP), Asa Wright Nature Centre (JP), Blue-chinned Sapphire (TT), Bearded Bellbird (TT), Scenic (JP), Rufous-tailed Jacamar (TT), Tropical Screech Owl (LP), Crab (JP), Starthroat Mango (TT), James (LP), American Flamingo (TT), Masked Cardinal (TT), Scarlet Ibis (TT), Tufted Coquette (TT), Gray-headed Kite (TT), Trinidad Piping-Guan (TT), Leatherback Turtles (JP), Baby leatherbacks (LP), Anhinga (TT), Red-crowned Woodpecker (LP), Spectacled Thrush (TT), Trinidad Motmot (TT), Blue-gray Tanager (TT), Shiny Cowbird (TT), Tom. Birding (LP), North Shore Drive (TT), Bridled Terns (TT), Scarlet Ibis and Flamingos (JP)